

# Juneberries for Montana Gardens

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**This publication briefly explains the basics of growing Juneberry, also known as serviceberry and shadbush. Juneberry grows under a wide range of climatic conditions and is useful in ornamental plantings, range restoration, wildlife plantings and windbreaks. The sweet, bland berries are a good source of manganese, magnesium and iron.**



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## **JUNE BERRY, ALSO KNOWN AS SERVICE BERRY**

and shadbush, is native to America and grows under a wide range of climatic conditions, being well-adapted to much of Montana.

The Juneberry (*Amelanchier* spp. *Nutt.*) is a member of the Rose family along with the apple, pear and raspberry. Other common names given the fruit include serviceberry, sarvisberry, mountain Juneberry, western shadbush and Rocky Mountain blueberry.

The bush grows as high as 18 feet on ideal sites and bears masses of white showy flowers in early spring. The fruit is borne in clusters of six to 12 and ripens to purple, red or black. Some cultivars have cream-colored fruit. Size of wild fruit ranges from ¼ to ⅜ inches in diameter, while some cultivated varieties have fruit to ⅝ inch diameter.

The fruits can be eaten fresh or used for wine, home canning, pies, jams and fruit rolls. The plants make attractive ornamentals and several species are used for range restoration, wildlife plantings and windbreak plantings.

## **Planting and production**

Juneberries will grow in a wide range of soil types, except those that are poorly drained. Good sandy loams are ideal. Several named cultivars are available from nurseries. Wild plants may be transplanted if the shrub is pruned to ground level after transplanting.

Juneberries bloom from late April to mid-May and should be planted on north or east slopes. Transplant vigorous young bushes 12 to 24 inches tall, trying not to destroy the fibrous roots. Set the plants two to three inches deeper than they grew in the propagation bed. Encourage suckering for maximum yields.

Juneberries bear fruit two to four years after planting, with fruit ripening approximately 38 days after petal fall. Highest yields average 10 pounds per plant.

## **Propagation**

Juneberries can be propagated by transplanting suckers, by dividing crowns, or with root cuttings or seeds.

### **Seeds**

Seeds are the most economical method of propagation. However, many seedlings will differ from the parent in size and fruiting characteristics. Seedlings grow slowly and require two to four years to reach transplantable size.

It is difficult to propagate Juneberries from hardwood cuttings, and softwood cuttings give only fair results. Root cuttings and suckers are difficult to obtain in sufficient quantity and their removal often damages the parent plant. Sow seeds outdoors in late summer; about 25 percent of the seeds will germinate the following spring.

### **Root Cuttings**

Take pieces of root about the diameter and length of a pencil in the fall and store in the refrigerator for two months to satisfy their dormancy requirement. The cuttings may also be taken in the early spring when the plants are still dormant.

Promote sprouting by pretreating root cuttings in poly bags filled with moist peat moss and stored in the dark for three weeks at 70°F. Shoots will appear on the root pieces in two to four weeks, at which time you can place the pieces in a seeding flat, cover with a non-soil medium and place in a greenhouse. Allow the shoots to grow for two weeks, then remove the cuttings to a moist bed to root. Keep root pieces moist and shaded until additional new shoots are well developed – several inches long, and thick for their length.

## **Suckers**

Dig suckers in early spring when plants are dormant and prune the tops back to about two inches above the roots. Plant the pruned suckers in shaded rows or in a shady spot and keep them moist.

## **Crown Division**

Plants five years or older will provide between 10 and 25 divisions of transplant size. Transplant these into sandy soil, which stimulates the development of well-rooted side shoots.

## **Weed control**

Shallow cultivation and hand weeding are necessary; deep cultivation can damage roots and encourage suckers to develop. If the crop is irrigated, grass may be seeded and maintained between rows.

## **Pruning**

Juneberries require regular pruning in late winter or early spring. Flowers develop on previous year's and older growth. Vigorous new growth yields the greatest production of good quality fruit. Remove all weak, diseased and low-spreading branches.

## **Irrigation**

Juneberries in yard plantings require little irrigation, though irrigating in dry years increases the success of plant establishment and fruit production. Once plants are established, irrigation is not often necessary. Trickle irrigation is most efficient and economical.

## **Fertilizing**

Juneberries need little fertilizer. If new growth is weak apply a handful or two of complete fertilizer, such as 5-10-10, to the area beneath the dripline of the bush in early spring before growth begins.

## **Harvesting**

Fruit is usually hand-picked.



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## **Cultivars**

### ***Atlaglow***

An attractive, ornamental, white-fruited cultivar that is readily pollinated by blue-fruited cultivars.

### ***Forestburg***

This is a large-fruited cultivar producing fruit of satisfactory quality, ripening slightly later than 'Pembina.'

### ***Northline***

Similar to 'Pembina' but higher-yielding.

### ***Paleface***

Fruit is large, snow white and mild-flavored. The fruit must be handled carefully since it turns brown from bruising a few minutes after picking.

### ***Pembina***

The fruit are large, slightly oval, full-flavored, sweet and grow in long clusters. The plant is very productive, upright, slightly spreading and vigorous.

### ***Smokey***

The fruit are large, round, unusually sweet, mild-flavored and produced in medium sized clusters. The plant is very productive.

### ***Others***

Older cultivars: 'Alpina' (dwarf cultivar from Colorado), 'Gardener', 'Williams' and 'Green' were named and released in the U.S. at the turn of the 20th century.

## **Bird damage**

Bird damage can be serious in unprotected plantings. Screens and netting are nearly 100 percent effective in protecting fruit. Noise, guns, radio and bird distress signals deter – but do not control – fruit predators.

## **Nutrition and use**

Juneberry fruit are higher in protein, fat, fiber, calcium, magnesium and manganese than blueberries and strawberries, and are a good source of manganese, magnesium and iron. 'Moonlake' and 'Northline' are preferred for processed products since their seed size and weight are significantly less than other cultivars.